

Dear Chairperson Linehan, Chairperson Maher, and Esteemed Members of the Committee on Children:

I am writing to express my support of SB-929: An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students.

The Connecticut Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics represents over 1000 nutrition professionals across the state. Our organization is the leading advocate of the dietetic profession in Connecticut, serving the public through the promotion of optimal nutrition, health, and well-being. Our membership includes Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs), Nutrition and Dietetic Technicians, Registered (NDTRs), students, and retirees of the profession. I am a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist serving people with diabetes.

As a nutrition professional, I support SB-929 because of the potential of universal school lunches to improve the health and educational attainment of children in our state. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity nearly doubled from 1 in 10 children to 1 in 6 children in Connecticut. The negative and costly impacts of childhood food insecurity include mental health issues, diabetes, obesity, and impaired cognitive development. Access to free school meals has been shown to not only alleviate these consequences of food insecurity, but increase school attendance, decrease juvenile delinquency, and fight child abuse and neglect.

Implementing universal school lunch is a worthwhile investment in our communities. Every dollar spent on school lunches offers over 2 dollars in return on investment through improvements in health and economic wellbeing. Furthermore, investment in school lunches creates jobs and brings revenue to businesses throughout the state.

I serve a population of people with diabetes. Having diabetes takes time, energy, and resources away from the family system. Knowing children are well fed during school hours will reduce this household burden on many Connecticut families.

We ask for your support of SB-929 to provide the children of Connecticut with equitable access to both quality nutrition and a quality education. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully,

Johanna Eichner, RDN

Manchester, CT